DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 731 EA 025 182

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TITLE Educational Partnerships as a Force for Educational Change: Findings from a National Study.
INSTITUTION Southwest Regional Lab., Los Alamitos, CA.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Apr 93
CONTRACT OERI-91-043
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Atlanta, GA, April 12-16, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Responsibility; Change Strategies; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Innovation; *Organizational Theories; *Partnerships in Education; *Program Effectiveness; *School Business Relationship; School Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS *Educational Partnerships Program (OERI)

ABSTRACT

An evaluation of the Educational Partnerships Program (EPP) examines the feasibility of using earlier research on educational change to foster such change. Also, studying educational partnerships between businesses and schools can determine the limits and possibilities of using them to foster change. The Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) and the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) documented and evaluated the EPP administered by the Department of Education's Educational Networks Division. The study examines 22 EPP projects and treats them as innovations with two distinct aspects: first, as innovations in organizational arrangements and second, as developers and implementers of programmatic innovations. Innovation research and legitimate reasons. Most of the EPP projects were initiated to address particular problems, although some were started because of disagreement among school leaders over how to address a problem. About half of the projects included all stakeholders in implementing the plan. The study found that partnerships grounded in opportunism had less feedback and had conflicting agendas. In general, educational partnerships help students move from school to adult responsibility. Students become more realistic about the demands of being an adult, business people gained appreciation for the complexity of education, and educators learned ways of improving curriculum and instruction. (Contains 13 references.) (JPT)

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ED 360 731

EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AS A FORCE FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE: FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL STUDY

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American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting
Atlanta GA
April 1993

EA 025 182

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INTRODUCTION

The Documentation and Evaluation of the Educational Partnerships Program (EPP) provides a double opportunity. First, the study has explored the applicability of key findings from earlier research on educational change to a new approach to fostering such change. Second, by documenting and evaluating a sizable number of educational partnerships, we are able to develop understanding of the possibilities and constraints for using partnerships to bring about change.

The Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) and the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) received a contract from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) to document and evaluate the EPP administered by the Educational Networks Division, Programs for the Improvement of Practice, OERI, U.S. Department of Education. The study uses a conceptual framework drawn largely from the research on innovation and change. From this perspective, the partnerships are innovations with two distinct aspects. First, they are innovations in *organizational arrangements*. Second, they develop and implement *programmatic innovations*. As "double" innovations, the partnerships allow us to explore earlier findings about educational change.

In this paper, I report on findings related to issues raised by earlier research about *initiation* of innovations, particularly the importance of a problem-solving perspective of initiators and the involvement of key participants in the proposed innovation, and on *implementation* of the innovations, particularly the effects of the loss of key personnel and the importance of assistance at the level at which activities take place.

The paper is organized as follows. First, I provide an overview of the partnerships funded by OERI. This is followed by our findings with regard to earlier research. The final section of the paper is more speculative, although grounded in the study. In this last section, I raise questions about what might be limits to educational partnerships as a strategy for educational change.

THE EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

At the time of data collection and analysis on which this paper is based, OERI had funded two cycles of partnership projects for a total of 22 projects. Two additional cycles have been funded.

Summary of Project Characteristics

The 22 EPP projects differ in many ways. In this section, their characteristics are summarized. First, the major programmatic foci are described. Second, variations in the projects' history of innovation are discussed, followed by summaries of pre-partnership relationships, environmental

context, and external accountability.

Programmatic Foci

The programmatic foci of the funded partnerships programs can be classified in a variety of ways. One approach is to organize the discussion according to the curriculum content of the partnership. Another is to focus primarily on the client groups that benefit from partnership activities. In the following section, both schemes are used. However, a number of the projects are difficult to classify according to either system because they aim at major reform of the educational system. Such "systemic change" programs included multiple client groups and curriculum content areas. Systemic change projects are included in both schemes and discussed as a separate category.

Table 1 summarizes the programmatic characteristics of the projects.

Curriculum

Projects funded by the EPP focused on three curricular areas. Seven projects (32%) had a primary focus on mathematics and science; 10 (45%) on the transition from school to adult responsibility, including career education; and 2 (9%) on alternative education programs. The curriculum content of the other two crossed many areas.

Within the math/science area, however, there were markedly different goals and related approaches. Of the seven projects, five were primarily concerned with improving curriculum and instruction. In those projects, partners developed and adapted curriculum and engaged in staff development in order to engage students in more challenging mathematics and science curricula. In the other two, objectives centered on encouraging more students to choose math/science/technology careers and included such elements as internships in scientifically oriented businesses, assignment of mentors from the science and technology program, and visiting scientist programs. In short, one approach involves changes in core areas of schools and the other, a variety of add-ons to the school program.

The career education programs also differed. Although all involved students leaving schools for some community-based experience such as job shadowing or internships, only four included changes in the school curriculum to emphasize specific careers. Two of these sponsored "career academies," schools-within-schools that structure the major portion of student experience around teaching the content required for success in a particular career and exposing the student to the world of work. The others were "tech-prep" or "2+2" programs, articulating high school and postsecondary work.

Table 1
Programmatic Foci

	Curriculum			Client				Systemic Change
Project	Math/Science	School to Adult	Alternative Ed.	At Risk	Gifted	Drop Out	Noncollege	
A			X			X		
B				X		X		
C				X	X			X
D		X						
E	X							X
F			X	X				
G		X			X			
H	X			X				X
I		X		X			X	
J	X							
K		X		X			X	
L	X			X				
M				X	X			
N	X	X						
O		X					X	X
P	(Unclassified)							
Q								X
R				X				
S		X		X			X	
T		X		X				
U		X					X	
V	X	X		X		X		

The alternative education programs constituted full school days that served the needs of school dropouts or potential dropouts.

Clients

Partnerships focused on particular client groups. The largest number (12 or 55%) served mainly at-risk or educationally disadvantaged students. Another group (5 or 23%) focused on the

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noncollege bound or the "forgotten half." Finally, three projects (14%) focused on the gifted and three on dropouts or potential dropouts. The curriculum content for each of the groups varied, with both gifted and at-risk students receiving career education and math/science opportunities. Dropouts and potential dropouts were involved in alternative education and career education.

Systemic Change

Five projects (23%) are attempting to bring about systemwide changes through the educational partnership. In these projects, the specific content area addressed or client group served is less important than efforts to changes governance, relationships, and the nature of curriculum and instruction. Although they include math, science, career education, and other curriculum areas, curriculum is used to change how students and teachers relate to one another and to encourage "active learning" on the part of students. Further, community experiences for students and teachers are designed to change how community members and school people relate to one another and to allow for mutual influence. For example, they may involve integrating social services into the school. Finally, decisionmaking processes are changed, generally to include more individuals from both within the schools and the community.

RELATIONSHIP OF FINDINGS TO EARLIER RESEARCH

Research on innovation indicates that projects are *initiated* for a variety of reasons. For example, some schools and districts begin the innovation process for opportunistic reasons, taking advantage of available funds (Greenwood, Mann, & McLaughlin, 1975). Another form of opportunism is initiating a project as a political response to a situation in which leaders wish to demonstrate to the community that they are trying to solve a problem even if they are not really committed to doing so (Huberman & Miles, 1984). Still another opportunistic motive is using innovation as a means of career advancement (Smith et al., 1986). Studies of the innovation process have consistently found that opportunistic approaches to educational change are unlikely to have much impact (Greenwood, Mann, & McLaughlin, 1975; Fullan, 1991).

Other projects begin as a response to problems perceived as important. When an innovation is initiated to address a local (or state) need, success is more likely.

Earlier research has raised questions about the importance of participation in the initiation of an innovation. Although many attempts at innovation begin with involving those who will be affected by the change (Smith & Keith, 1971) and some have called for participation as a means of overcoming resistance to change (Gross et al., 1971), "there is some evidence that large-scale participation at the initiation phase is sometimes counterproductive" (Huberman & Miles, 1984).

The EPP documentation and evaluation offers some insights into participation as an aspect of initiation.

The study also illuminates two issues raised about *implementation* in earlier studies. First, earlier "research on implementation has demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that ...sustained *interaction and staff development* are crucial regardless of what the change is concerned with" (Fullan, 1991, p. 86). The OERI-funded partnerships varied in the amount of assistance they offered to those charged with implementing the programmatic changes. We focused on the importance of content assistance as compared to other types of resources in bringing about successful implementation.

Second, research has shown, as Fullan (1991, p. 200) puts it, that "turnover...takes a heavy toll on change." More than half the OERI-funded partnerships experienced turnover in key personnel so we were able to analyze the effects of such changes on implementation.

Initiation

Most EPP projects were initiated to address particular problems in the area served, although there were some disagreements among partners about what the crucial problems were and how best to address them. Of the projects funded in the first two cohorts, 15 (68%) had a problem-solving orientation at the time of initiation and 3 (14%) were opportunistic. Another 4 projects were mixed; that is, one or more partners initiated the project to address a need while other partners entered opportunistically. The 3 opportunistic projects are experiencing major implementation problems and, with the mixed projects, implementation is either slow or extremely segmented. Full implementation is occurring only in projects with a problem-solving orientation.

The issue of participation in the initiation of partnerships has two aspects. First, partnerships are designed to bring together a number of organizations. As a result, one issue concerns whether all organizations were involved in deciding to enter the partnership. Second, within the organizations, there is a question of which individuals should be involved. Prior to applying for funds, potential (or existing) partnerships carried on conversations with the organizations or individuals they wished to involve in the project. These conversations, if they existed, focused on two issues. The first was the role of the partner and the second, the programmatic content of the partnership project.

In 10 of the partnerships, conversations about role included all partners; in 7, only some of the partners; and in 5, the staff of the organization applying for funds met with other partners individually. In no case was full implementation achieved without involving all organizations. Further, although legally school districts are the partners in all cases, the absence of conversation with "target" school staff frequently contributed to segmented implementation. Sharing content

information also is associated with implementation. In all but 2 cases where the players were appropriately involved in conversations about the roles they were to play, they also were apprised of the content of the program activities. The 2 projects receiving limited content information remain segmented in implementation. As important, full implementation occurred in all but 1 partnership with prefunding conversations that included all players and shared complete information on program content.

Problem Solving and Opportunism Revisited

The initial orientation of the organizations and individuals involved in the EPP clearly had an effect on early implementation. Although a problem-solving orientation does not guarantee successful implementation, opportunism creates a barrier against it. The longitudinal nature of the EPP evaluation will allow us to find the strength of the barriers and whether a problem-solving orientation at initiation facilitates overcoming implementation problems throughout a partnership's history.

After the first and second years of partnership operation it seems that opportunism is not the reason for problematic implementation. Rather, the opportunism that spurred the seeking of funds is associated with ways of thinking about other participants and sponsored activities. In opportunistically generated projects, less feedback seems to be sought. Further, each partner has an agenda, and because funding is seen as advancing the individual agendas, there is less interest in or opportunity to share agendas and to come to a consensus about project goals and activities. In contrast, if even one partner has joined the arrangement to solve a real problem, there is pressure within the structure to assess, formally or informally, how much progress is being made.

Over time, and with the opportunity to meet with other funded partnerships, even the most opportunistically generated projects may reorient themselves. Further, outside pressures within the local (or state) context may change the orientation. For example, the interest of the state commissioner of education puts pressure on the statewide partnerships cited above. That pressure may result in a shared focus or in one partnership group "taking over" the funded partnership.

Participation Revisited

While there is little disagreement that individuals and organizations involved in innovation should participate in key decisions about the innovation, there are questions about the level of participation necessary (Huberman & Miles, 1984). After one or two years of implementation, it seems clear that in partnership programs all organizations proposed as partners should be aware of the program and the roles they will play. When a business is not aware, there is little active participation.

Further, awareness of the program content also is important. Such awareness will avoid problems such as ones experienced in which a proposed partner had no interest in participating or believed the partnership was more a burden than a help. Such is true in the projects that failed to discuss proposed activities with all players.

Participation also may reveal differences in agendas. Such differences can be resolved through consensus or compromise at the planning stage. They also may be such that building a partnership is unrealistic and other methods for addressing problems should be sought.

Perhaps more important, failure to involve key participants may be an expression of the attitudes of the initiating partner(s). Organizations that propose to involve other organizations but do not ask about their interest treat the others as passive recipients of services. In the case of the funded partnerships, such treatment indicates a sense of the recipient as a "client." When businesses or other organizations external to educational institutions treat schools as clients, school-based professionals frequently resist change (Fullan, 1991). As one participant in such a project said, "They're always telling us what to do." The "provider-client" attitude includes a sense that the outside organization has more, rather than different, knowledge than inside professionals. Resistance is increased when assistance is not forthcoming. There are examples of involvement of school districts at the point of initiation but not of the particular schools in which activities occur. In those cases, school personnel may feel bureaucratic pressure, as well as a sense of imposition.

Implementation

Two issues frame this discussion of how the study of educational partnerships illuminates findings from earlier research. Our concern for implementation led us to look carefully at the effects of various kinds of assistance at the level at which activities took place. In addition, we were concerned about the effect of changes in personnel on implementation of partnership structures and the programs they fostered.

Content Assistance

The study of the OERI-funded partnerships supports earlier work indicating the importance of content assistance for full implementation. The partnerships provided assistance in the form of planning time, training, matching staff to need, and technical assistance/content support. Both the numbers and types of different resources provided to those implementing program activities differed in fully implemented projects from those in segmented projects. Projects with segmented implementation were much more likely than fully implemented projects to provide only one form of

aid. This was the case for 54% of the segmented projects, whereas all but two fully implemented projects provided more than one form of aid, with 36% incorporating three to four different types.

The type of resource also differed between segmented and fully implemented projects. Fully implemented projects placed greater emphasis on technical assistance and content support (88%) than did segmented projects (23%). Conversely, training was emphasized in segmented projects (54%) more frequently than in fully implemented projects (37%).

Two resources were associated with implementation. Projects providing personnel matched to the task, as well as providing appropriate technical assistance or content support, were most likely to achieve full implementation. Each of these also was individually associated with implementation. *In no case was full implementation accomplished without either matching or assistance*. Matching and assistance were particularly potent when combined, appearing *as a pair* in all but three fully implemented projects.

Our finding that those charged with implementing changes need content assistance is in line with prior research about educational innovation (Sarason, 1990; Louis & Miles, 1990; Crandall et al., 1986; Fullan, 1991). Although early training may introduce ideas and procedures, implementation requires those charged with implementing to understand the meaning of the change (Fullan, 1991). As individuals work with an innovation, they begin to experience problems that arise from the interaction of the innovation and the setting. Content assistance helps work through those problems. Further, new questions arise as some elements of the innovation are implemented. The important insight of Hall and Loucks (1977) that "change is a process, not an event" also implies that assistance is needed over time.

From one perspective, the importance of content assistance is similar to the importance of developing role clarity on the organizational level. Conversations about who the partners are and what they intend to accomplish help participants understand what they are expected to do and to whom they are expected to relate, allowing commitment rooted in understanding of partnership demands and benefits. Similarly, the provision of content assistance allows those charged with implementing activities, frequently teachers, to enter a dialogue that enhances their understanding of the changes in curriculum, instruction, or relationships with others that they are expected to make. Further, those providing the assistance generally enter the setting with more knowledge of the content of the innovation than the teachers but far less knowledge of the context. Successful implementation results from an "*exchange [of] reality* of what should be through interaction with implementers and others concerned" (Fullan, 1991, p. 105).

We noted one unfortunate result in two projects when content assistance was not provided. Both partnerships were implementing curricular and instructional change in mathematics and science in urban settings. In both, implementation in classrooms was uneven. Those who developed the innovation came from nonpublic school settings. They attributed the low level of

implementation to, in the words of one evaluator, "teachers' lack of foundational knowledge." Such a lack, if it exists, can be dealt with by the provision of extended intensive assistance. The content, after all, is elementary and middle school math and science, not rocket science. Further, an equally intellectually demanding innovation in another urban setting was fully implemented. In that case, teachers received assistance. And, the teachers themselves rate assistance positively and ask for more.

The alternative to content assistance is matching the demands of the innovation to existing talents and knowledge. There were partnerships with full implementation that took such an approach. The matching strategy may ease early implementation but limits the potential spread of change. Further, we have noted the frequency of personnel changes, and implementation suffers when talents change.

Changes in Key Personnel

A clear challenge to a partnership's ability to solve problems arises when, at any phase in its development, loses a key player or key partner. Such loss can occur from a variety of reasons, including retirement, death, bankruptcy, and change in priorities. How the loss affects partnership implementation depends on how the project deals with it. Two examples from funded partnerships illustrate differences in approaches to dealing with personnel and organizational change.

The first example demonstrates the potential for disruption of such changes. In one project, both the project coordinator/grant writer and the superintendent, who was the acknowledged visionary leader, left the community soon after the grant was received. Only one meeting of participants had occurred, and the structure of the project had not been established nor any activities begun. The project, therefore, came to a halt until a new superintendent was hired and a new project coordinator put in place. This took almost an academic year and left some business partners less willing to participate than anticipated.

In contrast, in a school-to-adult responsibility transition program centering on job-shadowing experiences, the project staff member responsible for garnering business commitments was judged wrong for the position by his supervisors. The position remained vacant for some time while the participating organizations collaborated in the hiring process, which took three postings of the position. The discussions among the partners about the applicants helped clarify roles and relationships. Further, the key personnel change occurred after the project was fully implemented so other staff members were able to cover the responsibilities of the position.

Key changes to the personnel or in the organization of a project were generally experienced as linked phenomena. Of the 14 projects sustaining key personnel and/or organizational changes, 10 experienced both. The remaining 4 were evenly split, 2 experiencing only key personnel

changes and 2 experiencing only organizational changes. Further, 29% of the projects with changes achieved full early implementation. Stability versus change does not seem to be a good indicator of probable implementation, as exactly half (4) of the fully implemented projects are among those experiencing change—2 with key changes in both arenas, 1 with a change of organization only, and 1 with a change of personnel only.

The two projects most adversely affected by the loss of individuals both lost more than one key person before partnership roles were clear and activities developed. In one of these, there was a long delay before personnel were replaced. Both have begun operation and may become fully implemented, albeit later than planned. However, the project with the most changes (loss of two business partners, the death of the superintendent, and relocation of the project director) has little implementation at the organizational level and activities are not integrated.

The seven projects with personnel changes and segmented implementation had additional characteristics associated with limited implementation. In one project, it seems clear that personnel changes, which involved the loss of three consecutive project coordinators, are symptomatic of other problems. That project is one initiated from opportunistic motives, with little clarity in roles and relationships and experiencing conflict. At the start, not all participants were consulted and there are diffuse activities implemented with little content assistance. In the remainder, there were other characteristics (e.g., lack of prefunding conversations, absence of content assistance) associated with segmented implementation, but relationships among them are not clear.

Because changes in key personnel will occur in many partnerships, the three funded partnerships that survived such changes are particularly instructive. In them, the loss occurred after project activities were underway and partnership structures were in place. In two, the individuals who left were unsuccessful in filling their roles as staff to the partnerships. Indeed, the lack of success helped partners focus on the qualities needed in the position. All three approached replacement in a manner that strengthened the partnership. In one, for example, consensus among partners was required and although the job was posted three times, the final decision satisfied everyone. The process also provided experience working through disagreements.

Clearly, policymakers and program developers are unable to determine when staff or partners leave a partnership. However, they are able to approach the task of replacement in a manner that strengthens the partnership. They can, for example, require that all agree on the job description or the qualities brought by an organization. Working out the details provides practice in joint decisionmaking that clarifies roles and relationships. Similarly, structures can be put in place that involve partners in screening applicants. Finally, in most cases, staff members are officially employees of one participating organization and must, therefore, meet the standards of that organization. Partners can use the process to learn how to reinforce one another as each organization deals with its own constraints.

GROUNDED SPECULATION ABOUT PARTNERSHIPS AS AN APPROACH TO EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

Educational partnerships began as a means for improving education. Partnerships between businesses and schools increased from an estimated 40,000 in 1983 to 140,000 in 1988 (Foltz, 1990). Doyle (1989) asserts that business and industry involvement in education is related to their belief that profit and productivity depend on making changes in schools. Further, the argument is that school people require the political support, resources, and expertise that partnerships bring to public education to make the necessary changes (Hood, 1991). The documentation and evaluation of the EPP gives both support and caution to efforts to use partnerships to improve schools. In this section, I will elaborate on both possibilities and limitations of partnerships.

The first year of our study indicates that educational partnerships are extremely useful in improving students' opportunities to move from school to adult responsibility. When successful, projects involving job-shadowing experiences, mentorships, internships, and other chances for adolescents to gain experience in the work place had three benefits. First, students became more realistic about the demands of adulthood. Their motivation to develop their skills, particularly in technical fields, increased. Second, some, although not all, participating business people came to value the complexity of the work of the schools. Third, school people gained insight into ways they should improve curriculum and instruction in order to prepare their students better for the demands of work.

The two cohorts of OERI-funded partnerships on which this paper reports included only one example of a partnership involving coordinated social services. I believe, however, that parallel benefits to those coming from school to adulthood transition programs will accrue to such partnerships. In both types of partnerships, relationships across organizations are *essential* to success. And, both types of partnerships have inherent incentives for interorganizational work. All participating organizations can do their work better if they form a partnership, and there is an intention to have an impact on all partners. Consequently, the difficult tasks of communicating across organizations (and cultures) seems to participants to be worthwhile.

Similar value is felt by partnerships that systematize volunteer efforts. I was impressed by the impulse for service throughout the private sector, and the businesses that participate in the OERI-funded partnerships realize the payoff they will get from facilitating the voluntarism of their employees. Such activities as tutoring and speaking to classes raised morale in business. The activities also mitigated racism in at least one setting as the tutors came to know young people of a different race. Further, voluntary service in schools gave front-line and midlevel executives insight into how people learn, which they then applied in their supervisory roles.

Because partnerships are difficult to develop and sustain, such mutual benefits are essential. In addition, school-based practitioners are more comfortable in partnerships when they believe their partners are changing while asking them to change. The greatest problems were in schools in which teachers and administrators felt they were being "done to" and not worked with. It is this sense of mutuality that was absent from many of the partnerships that attempted curriculum development or systemic change. We found that it was extraordinarily difficult to achieve full implementation on the planned schedule when curriculum change was the focus of the project.

The difficulty of changing curriculum is related to our findings about the importance of content assistance. In the curriculum change projects, teachers were developing or using materials based on new understandings of the content and of how children learn. These are complex tasks, requiring time, dialogue, and support. When combined with applying computer or other advanced technology, the task becomes even more daunting. In one project, teachers were inexperienced with personal uses of computers and began by learning basic functions. Obviously, they did not develop much learner-centered curriculum during the first year. Projects commonly proposed curriculum development by teachers or external partners during the first year and then spreading the use of the new curriculum to additional teachers in subsequent years. In no case did this occur. One project, in which there was a great deal of assistance, came close.

Perhaps curriculum change is an inappropriate candidate to be the focus of partnership activity. Teachers and administrators frequently welcomed the expert advice of partners, but equally frequently resented the attitude that they need to be led through the process. School-based professionals are unclear as to what their partners gain from curriculum activities and interpret interest as lack of confidence.

As a result of the first year of the study, it seems likely that partnerships between business and schools or between social service agencies and schools should be encouraged only when the benefits to all parties are clear. I do not believe there must be equality and collaboration in partnerships; indeed, we found success with other structures. But the difficulty of forming new relationships and the importance of trust in that formation are such that success seems unlikely if a major player believes it is a target rather than a colleague.

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